10-31-1998

Violette, Elmer oral history interview

Don Nicoll

Interview with Elmer Violette by Don Nicoll

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee
Violette, Elmer

Interviewer
Nicoll, Don

Date
October 31, 1998

Place
Portland, Maine

ID Number
MOH 055

Biographical Note

Elmer H. Violette was born on February 2, 1921 in Van Buren, Maine. His father was a woodsman, and a butcher/grocer during the Depression. His mother was a schoolteacher, and raised seven children. Both parents were strong Democrats. His father served in the Maine Legislature for three terms. Mr. Violette was a Roman Catholic, and served as an alter boy as a teenager. He attended Ricker College and earned a two-year degree. In 1941, he was elected to the Maine Legislature, and was drafted soon thereafter. After discharge, he returned to Van Buren, and successfully ran again for a 1946 House term. After that, he attended Boston University School of Law, graduated in 1950, and returned to Van Buren once again to practice law. In 1964, Violette returned to Augusta as a State Senator. In 1966, he unsuccessfully ran for Senate against Margaret Chase Smith. He was also an active campaigner for Ed Muskie. In 1973, he was appointed to the Maine Superior Court by then Governor Ken Curtis. In 1981, he was appointed to the Maine Supreme Court, retiring in 1986. Elmer Violette passed away on June 18, 2000 at the age of 79 as a result of an automobile accident.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Aroostook County, 1946-1999; Maine Democratic Party post-1946; Party organization; Violette's contributions to the 1960s Maine legislature; the seclusion

of Aroostook County; Dickey-Lincoln; Allagash Wilderness Waterway; Sumner Pike; running against Margaret Chase Smith; 1968 Maine Convention debates; Ed Muskie's 1968 Vice Presidential campaign; Congressional campaigns of the early 1970s; politics as a justice; Bob Haskell; and John Martin.

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Transcript

Don Nicoll: It is Saturday the 31st of October, 1998. We are at 9 Highland Street in Portland, Maine. Don Nicoll interviewing Elmer Violette. This is the second in our series of interviews. Elmer, when we talked last time, we concluded on your election to the state legislature in 1946 and didn't manage to get very far into that service. But I wanted to ask you, when you went to the legislature what were the big issues that were weighing on you as a member of the house from Van Buren, St. John valley and Aroostook county?

Elmer Violette: Well, they were basically economic conditions. The valley had started to suffer from loss of industry. We'd had some very sizeable lumber mills that had closed and were totally gone, actually, perhaps resulting in a loss of perhaps three or four hundred permanent jobs for working people. The lumber mills were really the only industry outside of the agricultural industry. So we were suffering, the town of Van Buren and I think the whole area began suffering from those losses. So I think my, certainly one of my major concerns was to see what we could do to try to correct that. And that, I guess I'd have to say that was my, in going to the legislature, that certainly was, certainly strongly on my mind and see what could be done at the state level to start, you know, correcting that, so.

DN: And that didn't really change much over the years, did it?

EV: No, it did not. In fact, I don't know whether it's . . ., I don't know whether it has changed period from all, it was strictly down hill. Van Buren is a very, very active town and good business town. It's continuing to lose population after that, and it's consistently continued to lose population, so my going to the legislature was seeing, hoping, what could be done to correct that.

DN: You were part of a group of veterans just back from the war.

EV: Yes.

DN: Was there much of a sense of a new breed coming into the legislature on both sides of the aisle?

EV: Oh, I think there was, I think there was definitely. Well, I had nothing to base myself on, obviously, because I'd not been to the legislature before. It would be my first term. But we knew what we faced in 1966, in going to the Maine legislature. As a result of that election I think we wound up with either twenty-two or twenty-four representatives, Democratic representatives. We used to joke that we held our caucuses in phone booths and, but, you know, we started, you know. What I think picked up as a result of that election, I think perhaps picked

up some members that showed promise in developing the party, spreading the message of the Democratic party and what it stood for.

DN: Now after the '47, '48 term, you went to law school.

EV: That's correct, that's right.

DN: And went back to Van Buren to practice law.

EV: Correct.

DN: And when did you start practice?

EV: I started practice in 1950. I graduated from BU Law School in 1950 and hung up my shingle in Van Buren and started practicing law.

DN: Were you active in party politics at that time?

EV: Oh yes, oh yes. I had, of course I had been away from party politics because of my service, being in the service in 1942 until the end of 1945. But when I returned from the service and went to law school, Marcella and I decided that that was the best course for me to take. And I don't know if I've told you that, that this resulted, this really set a situation where we were married, we had already one child, and Marcella became somewhat of a widow and stayed in Van Buren and taught school. And I went, I became a widower and went through three years to law school in Boston.

DN: Did you feel as if you were pioneering in a way?

EV: Well, for me it was pioneering, it was pioneering. And, of course, in the interim I think the Democratic Party had shown some growth statewide, and I guess my, you know, my concerns in returning to the legislature after I started practicing law. But I became very active also in the Democratic Party.

DN: Now when did you run for the legislature again?

EV: I did not run for the legislature again until 1964, although I had become very active in the party statewide and party wise. But I was busy building up my law practice ...

DN: Was that a solo practice?

EV: Yes, yes. And so in 1964, I guess we go back to the Goldwater years, and I decided, well I had become county chairman, Democratic party county chairman ...

DN: When was that?

EV: I don't know just at what year, but it had been a few years before 1964. And I'd worked

very hard, not just I but many others had worked very hard to build up the party. People like Floyd Harding, for instance, Joe Freeman, just to mention some. And so we had been working very, very hard at party building and party organization. We were the first uh, we were the first party to buy time on TV, and to actually buy time on TV and put on programs regarding our work. And uh . . .

DN: This was the county committee?

EV: That's right, that's right. And so we were actually pioneers in our region in going somewhat modern, shall we say. That had never been done there.

DN: Which election did you buy television first, remember? Was it the 1954 election?

EV: No, I think it was the 1964, yeah, 1964 election. We might have, I think it's the first year that we actually organized to the level that we bought time, yes.

DN: Now, let's drop back to 195- ...

EV: And I'll get back to something in that, in 1964 is after I had become, I had been practicing and so forth, and I had also been very active. I was county chairman, I, they put it up to me and they said, you've bagged so many of us to run for office, now it's your turn, you can't dodge it any more. So I ran for the senate in 1964. It just happened that we also fell with the good graces, good luck of having Barry Goldwater as a Republican candidate for president.

DN: That was the year that you gained a majority in the house and the senate.

EV: That's right, that's right, yes, yes we wound up with a, previously I think we'd had three Democratic senators and after the '64 election we were twenty-nine Democratic senators. I've forgotten the count in the house, but we also controlled the house by a pretty good margin. So then we really went to work.

DN: Now in 1965, Floyd was elected majority leader in the senate?

EV: Yes, yes.

DN: And Emilien Levesque in the house?

EV: In the house, yeah. And Bud Reed was elected president of, of all the senate. And so we started, we really started working.

DN: Now dropping back to 1950 when you started law practice, and in that year and in 1952 you were not a candidate, were you active ...?

EV: I was never a candidate again for any office until 1964, yes.

DN: When do you remember seeing Ed Muskie again after your time together in the legislature

in ‘55? In, excuse me, ‘47?

EV: Well, I saw him on and off. Of course he had become governor in 1954 was it?

DN: Yeah.

EV: Nineteen fifty-four.

DN: But in that earlier period from ‘50 to ‘54 when he was campaigning, did you see him, did you see him in connection with his OPS work?

EV: Yes, I did. In fact, yes I did in fact, I remember his coming up to Van Buren and we had a dinner together and so forth, and that was with respect to his OPS work.

DN: How did he handle that work? Did any of your clients have dealings with him?

EV: I don’t remember, Don, I don’t remember. They must have had to. They must have had to. But I think, I do have a clear memory of Ed. To me he was a, he was a man who I thought would be emerging to become a leader, a political leader in the state, even at that time because of the experience I’d had with him. For two years experience I’d had with him in 196—, in 1956, after we were elected to the legislature, and that’s the only term I served in the house. He had already become very, to me, very impressive and a fellow, I mean, I liked (Unintelligible).

DN: Now in ‘54 when he, oh in, excuse me but before that when Ed was national committeeman, did he also come to the county?

EV: I don’t have a recollection. I don’t have a recollection. And I guess that goes back from my loss of memory, you know, as I think I’ve told you that I’ve suffered in 1991 from a stroke and a lot of that memory is gone by.

DN: Well, in ‘54, do you remember, did you go to the state convention in ‘54 do you remember? In Lewiston?

EV: I was going, most of those years I was going to the state conventions pretty regularly, yes.

DN: Do you remember the mood at that March convention in Lewiston?

EV: Of what year?

DN: Fifty-four.

EV: No, I don’t.

DN: Did you get involved in the campaign in ‘54, at the county level?

EV: I don’t have a recollection.

DN: When, between ‘54 and ‘64 you were active in the county.

EV: Oh yes, definitely, definitely yes, and we had been . . . The work we were doing in the county was organization, organization. And by organization, among other things, I mean enrollment of Democrats, enrolling people in the Democratic Party, enrolling voters. And we increased the voting numbers, numbers of voters for instance in my town, by a very, very substantial margin, and that’s not only in Van Buren. We were doing that county wise, organizing town committees and then having those town committees go about registering and enrolling voters. We, we did some, a lot of hard work during that period of time, and it eventually counted.

DN: Now these are new voters?

EV: Absolutely, absolutely.

DN: That suggests that prior to this time, people tended not to register.

EV: Well, it would have to be the case, really. Because a lot of people were not, were not registered and were not voting. And throughout the county, we carried on a county-wide effort along those lines. And we eventually wound up with a Democratic majority of enrolled voters in the county by the sixties.

DN: And that took ten years or more.

EV: Oh yes, yeah. So my work along those lines, I never ran for office again, but I, as county chairman doing a significant part of that, that’s what I did. I didn’t do it just myself, you know, but that’s the work we did.

DN: In doing that work, who were some of the people who helped? You’ve mentioned Floyd, you’ve mentioned Joe Freeman. Do you remember some of the other folks who ...?

EV: Oh, we had the McGillicuddys in Houlton, [Bob] Rush, Rush was in Houlton, the . . . . In other towns we had some very prominent farmers in Caribou, I can’t recall the, I can’t recall the names now. One got elected a Democratic representative in Caribou. And also in Limestone, Albert. So without recalling, and of course the valley, we did a very strong job of, we increased our, the number of registered voters in the valley, for instance, significantly. But we did that throughout the county obviously. So there were a lot of people involved, and a lot of businessmen involved in that, in working with us.

I remember one Republican in Van Buren telling me, he said “Elmer,” he says, “you know, if you’re really interested in going into politics, and I hope you do,” he said, “I don’t see any future for you in the Democratic party.” He says, “You should become a Republican.”

DN: You didn’t take his advice.

EV: I never took his advice and I guess he was right, I never did amount to anything in the

Democratic Party, you know, significantly as far as major office is concerned.

DN: Well, you had your defeats but you also had some significant victories in the 1960s. I'd like to talk about your time in the legislature, well before we get to the legislature, do you recall the relationship between the work you were doing in the county and the state committee, state organization? Did you get support, push from the state party? Or was this pretty much on your own?

EV: No, it was not on my own. No, no, the, I was, I used to, I would go to all the conventions, you know, state conventions, and so I had to have been at least fairly active also at the state level. But I never held any state party offices, by my own recollection.

The, uh . . . and that, I don't know what, how to put it, but at some point in my work in the party, and particularly after I was elected to the state senate, I don't know whether I had been operating or working with somewhat of an inferiority complex about how my status was with other people in the s-, but I did reach this, this is something that's always stuck to me, in my mind. I said to myself after I'd been in the senate, 'watch people work.' I said to myself, and having looked up to some of our Maine party leaders, I said to myself, and this is so ingrained in my mind, 'why have I been sitting back? I can out perform most of those guys with one hand in my pocket.' And this sounds strange, but Don, this is the exact truth. I don't know what sense this made, it made a lot. And I'd been sitting back and just watching those, you know, make the, not that it bothered me that I wasn't getting recognition for anything, that never bothered me at all. But I made up my mind that I knew just as much and I could do much more than most of those guys, others that were, at that time looked up as some of our big leaders.

DN: Were you, do you think your feelings were shared by others in the valley and the county?

EV: I don't know. I can't answer you. I can only answer for myself.

DN: Do you recall when you first met or what it was like working with Frank Coffin as chairman of the state committee in the early to mid-50s, mid-50s?

EV: Oh, I remember, I remember Frank very, very well. And, uh . . . But if you were, living in Van Buren, you know, northern Maine, you were significantly out of the loop, if I can phrase it, you know, as to what else is going on. Because you were just, you just never saw anybody unless you traveled down to southern Maine, which as I'm sure you yourself knows, a disadvantage.

DN: So that was a very long haul, to come down ...

EV: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. So you were, yeah I would say you were pretty much out of the loop. Not that you didn't, people didn't look at you as being, you know, somebody who could do something, but you were just not there because of the long distances of, you know. I didn't see Frank Coffin that often and, I didn't see Frank that often, I didn't see some of the other leaders and so forth, the national committee people and, you know, they were there and they were in the loop. So they didn't remember you very much but they remembered themselves. I

never had that many approach me and say, "Well, would you like to be national committeeman?" That never happened to me.

DN: Now in the 19-...

EV: And it happened to others in central Maine and southern Maine, but when I say, when I was out of the loop, I want to make myself clear. And there was no conflict, personal conflict, understand.

DN: Others have referred to that as benign neglect. In '64 you were elected to the state senate and you were involved in some major legislative initiatives during that period, principally the Allagash Waterway and the discussions of the Dickey-Lincoln School project.

EV: Oh yes, that became very paramount.

DN: Can you recall some of the, how that developed from your perspective and some of the events that went along with it?

EV: Well, in '60-, yeah, we, along about that period, of course we had captured the house and senate in 196-, after 1964 election, and, you know, we started working in what we thought should be a legislative agenda. And then in 1966 we elected a Democratic governor, Kenneth Curtis, and that really enabled us to really start, you know, making some organizational changes. And so we had been doing a substantial amount of work as a legislature, but nevertheless with the election of a governor . . . . Although maybe I should step back and say that these concepts that we came up with such as the Allagash Waterway, that had been, that had been developed very, very significantly by the Democratic controlled legislature and . . .

Well, the fact is that when we, when the state enacted the Allagash Waterway, Wilderness Waterway, it was done with John Reed as governor, so we had to have done a great deal of work. And it had become, I don't claim and I have never claimed that I'm the father or grandfather of, shall we say what I've always felt was one of the, something that was accomplished in Maine that had never been done before in the country, actually, which was the preservation of a major natural resource, such as the Allagash. And I don't claim to have been the one who originally conceived the concept of it, but I'm the only one who first said, "That river has to be preserved and the only way that that can be preserved is for the state to acquire it."

They had been talking, they had created an Allagash Wilderness Waterway organization before that, but they had done nothing. All they did was talk about, well, they'd talk about leases, for instance. Not written leases, word of mouth leases, you know, through the, between the state and the landowning companies. Now, I had no great opposition to the landowning companies as such, but they also were among one of the agencies that had controlled a lot of development in the state of Maine, a lot of development.

And I think I did conceive the idea that unless the state acquired that, it would never happen. And we set about getting that done with a hell of a lot of opposition from the major landowners. Nobody likes to have somebody take their land away from them. I don't know that I told them

that I'd like it myself, but I said, I don't think you're going to, first of all, your intentions are good, your intentions, and I don't disbelieve you, but you will not always be here. You're a part of a major, major corporation; what will you have to say five years from now, ten years from now as to whether you can still carry that out? You can't do it. There's only one way it can be done, is for the state to acquire it. And we proceeded to do that.

Of course, I say we, obviously Ed Muskie was very, very much involved in that because Ed was at the senate, state *[**sic** U.S.]* senate and of course had a Democratic administration, Johnson, President Johnson, and had a very, very strong secretary of interior, Stuart Udall who favored this project, among others. So it was a cooperative work of a lot of people, but nevertheless, we did, eventually did that part of it. There's only one problem, is that the state never did acquire, after that was enacted and the Allagash Waterway became a realization, the state of Maine just stood still. It never did anything more to strengthen the waterway authority and to acquire more land, which it should have done and had the opportunities many, many times but still never did it.

So, and of course we were not too successful in the other phase of what we hoped to be able to do in our region which was to develop a major power, electricity. We had always felt, and really it's truthfully right, that we had the highest, because we had the highest energy rates in the country, actually, in a sense. We just would not be able to develop a base for an industrial basis in northern Maine. So that we were not, unfortunately, able to realize, and Ed Muskie was one of the great leaders in that. But even without that, our own Democrats in Washington were killing us.

DN: Do you remember going to Washington early on to testify on the Dickey-Lincoln school project?

EV: Oh, yes.

DN: What was that like?

EV: Well, I thought it was, it was, it was quite an experience, really, quite an experience never having been. I don't know if it was, I'd never been to Washington many times before, but never having been to Washington on that kind of a, of a mission, I thought it was, it was quite, you know, I was somewhat apprehensive in sitting before a congressional committee and talking to them.

DN: Can you describe the session before the committee?

EV: Oh, it was very friendly. It was very friendly. If I remember, the, I don't know, we probably might have been before a sub-committee, or maybe the general public, I don't know what the ....

DN: I think it was the rivers and harbors committee of the public works committee.

EV: I think so, yeah. I remember that Congressman Jones was the chairman of that committee

and I don't, when I made my presentation I remember his telling me, he says, I, uh . . . Oh he says, "Senator Violette," he says, "I hear you very clearly," he says. We needed some votes in that committee, one or two votes. I don't recall what the setup was but one of the members on that committee was a Republican congressman from Ogdensburg [New York], John *sic* [Robert Cameron] McEwen[1], and he and I had been buddies in the service about two years in Goose Bay. And so they, I spoke with him by phone and so, several times anyway, so, they gave me a mission of trying to swing him over to our side to vote for our measure. And so when I got to Washington I had called him and we got together and had a very, very pleasant dinner together. He was a very nice guy, very nice fellow, nice personality. So, the best I could do was succeed in his taking a walk when we had the vote, when we voted, which was almost a victory.

DN: Old connections.

EV: Well, you never know, you never know. And he, actually, we were pretty hard on him because, and what I used on him was the fact that they were, northern New York was getting a substantial amount of energy from the St. Lawrence Seaway, and that's how . . . And so they were, they were in a very good position with respect to getting energy from the electricity generated by that St. Lawrence Seaway, so they were getting a big break, and so I worked, that's what I used on him, you know. Why, if they were getting that, that help, which involved a lot of federal money, why aren't you willing to help us, you know, do what we'd like to do, in our own area, and let us share some of that. Well, I think I got to him. I couldn't get to him to shift his vote but I got to him to take a walk.

DN: Some of the other efforts you were involved in related to the Allagash, involved the negotiations with the landowners when the time came for sale. Can you describe that?

EV: Yeah, now, we had been holding public hearings. I say we had been, the legislature had created a committee for development of the Allagash and St. John River. And we had a, it was a ten man committee and we held public hearings throughout the state and in these public hearings we, of course, invited people to attend. And we, every time that we had held a public hearing, and I think we must have held close to ten public hearings throughout the state, regionally. And at no time during all of those public hearings did we, did the landowner interests ever appear before our committee. So, and we were nearing the end of our, of that procedure, so I just felt that we couldn't, I mean, we absolutely had to meet with them somewhere or other.

So we eventually did agree to, they agreed to meet with us and we met with them at the Tarratine Club[2] in Bangor and of course I knew some of these, a lot of these, some of these people personally. But at any rate, the International Paper Company, Great Northern Paper Company, all of the land owning interests in Maine. And one of, so at some point, and we were telling

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[1] Robert Cameron McEwen, served as a Republican in the House of Representatives from Ogdensburg, New York, 1965-1981. In 1981 was appointed by President Reagan to the International Joint Commission, U.S. and Canada.

[2] The Tarratine Club is notable as a place where Maine's former vice president, Hannibal Hamlin, played cards and socialized every day of the week but Sunday when living in Maine.

them what our plans were, one of them says, he says, "Senator," he says, "the state of Maine cannot afford to acquire that land." We had developed our plans and what they were, measured in time, you know, in acreage and width and so forth, we got all the surveys done. "The state of Maine can't afford that land." I said, "Well, I don't know."

We had then committed, we had committed through a bond issue by the state a million and a half and then the federal government was coming in for a million and a half, that was three million dollars. He says, "The state of Maine cannot afford to buy that land." "Well, I don't know, we think we should be able to." "And do you realize that some of that property and some of that, those lake front properties carry a price, a value, a price of about two hundred dollars a running foot?" He says, "Now you go ahead and measure all of those feet around all those lakes, and the state of Maine no way can afford to buy it."

So for a moment that kind of stumped me. Then I thought to myself, well, I still think it can be done. You, if we can not acquire it like we would like to acquire right now, and it's not that we'd like to acquire, it's that we think we should be able to acquire, and we have to take this by eminent domain, we will take it by eminent domain. Now, if we take it by eminent domain, you will take us to court and you will proceed to establish, and assuming that you establish what you are telling me, that what is the value of that land, of that property ...

End of Side One, Tape One
Side Two, Tape One

EV: ... I said, "Assuming you can establish, you go to court, you sue the state, and you establish a value, anything relatively close to what you say that it's worth. I said, "Now you know the, what you are paying now for taxes on all those properties." I said, "Do you, and you, if you succeed in establishing that, do you think the people of the state of Maine will continue to tax you at the level that you are now paying for those lands? For the taxes?" I said, "This is not a threat, but," I said, "it's something that you've got to think about." So, you should have seen their faces. I had just thought of that, you know, it came like an inspiration to me. And I said, so . . . We ended the meeting and we had, I called a recess at that time. So we went out for the recess and so forth, and I'm trying to remember the . . . gosh that's awful . . . from Washington county ...

DN: Sumner Pike.

EV: Sumner Pike, he says, so we took a break. And he says, "So," he says, "Elmer I think we're going in the right direction, keep at them." So we came back in and continued to talk to some extent and then we recessed the meeting and agreed to meet again some other time. And we were walking down the hill from the Tarratine Club, so Sumner comes around and, of course Sumner was a Republican, obviously, but he had been supporting, didn't say much. He says, so he put his hand around my shoulder and he says, "Elmer," he says, "I think we've got them just where we want them." So I thought, well, that sounds good, Sumner, I'll take that. And of course we did eventually, we did eventually acquire that land from the major landowners and we had a surplus. Now this started, Great Northern was the first one, started to give land to the state, and some of the others did, too. And I think we wound up with having a surplus of about

close to three hundred thousand dollars out of our three million dollar budget and acquired what we had set out to acquire. So that was ...

DN: A great accomplishment.

EV: I think it was quite an accomplishment. But it was an accomplishment on the part of many people, you know, who really got into that, really. So, but that's how you, my first premise on that was, let's quit talking about leases and so forth, and so forth. If you're going to preserve it, and I think I'm the one actually at least came up with that idea, the only way you can preserve it is to acquire it.

DN: You obviously over the years worked with a number of characters in politics. Can you recall what it was like working with Sumner Pike whom you just mentioned?

EV: Oh, I thought it was very, I had a lot of respect for Sumner, and you had to have respect for him considering that he was a man, Sumner was no arch conservative, and Sumner had a very open mind. Of course he had been on the atomic, a commissioner I guess may be the term, on the nuclear energy commission and he'd had, he'd held a lot of high offices. And he was, but he was a very, he was a congenial man, he was a very practical man. He was no flaming liberal but he was no arch conservative either. And, because he had held some of those positions at the federal level under Democratic administrations, he was a good man. And I liked working with him and I think in substance I have no question that with respect to this Allagash Waterway and those projects, related projects such as the Dickey-Lincoln School, that he favored our objectives and quietly did what he could to help out.

DN: Now, 1966 ...

EV: It is not men like Sumner Pike who prevented us from realizing, for instance, the Dickey-Lincoln, Dickey project.

DN: In dealing with the Dickey-Lincoln project, you mentioned earlier that there were people, Democrats in the congress, who were opposed to it along with the Republicans.

EV: Oh, absolutely.

DN: There were also problems in Maine. Did you . . . What was it like working on Allagash and Dickey-Lincoln and dealing with some of the folks in Maine who opposed you on one and supported you on the other?

EV: Well, some of them, they were, well they were in essence irreconcilable, you know, that's nothing new. We tried to, they had their own little empires, for instance, the utility people, electric, Maine Public Service, Bangor Hydro, although Bangor Hydro eventually became much more supportive because of Bob Haskell. But, you know, we just, they had their, it's as though they . . . What we told them is that what we were trying to accomplish really was for the benefit of all the citizens of Aroostook County. If you talk about Aroostook County, you know, lower the price of energy which will then allow us to attract industry. And we had prime examples, for

God sakes, of having a very large potato processing plant in Aroostook county owned by, I've forgotten the name of the company now in Idaho. And they were, the same size processing plant in Idaho with the assistance of all of the federally created energy in our part of the country, were paying something about under a million dollars a year for energy. And that same size plant in Presque Isle was paying well over two million dollars of energy to run that plant.

Well, it made no sense. Nothing we could do was to shake those people, you know, to, and we tried to tell them, you'll make as much money, you'll make more money from your own utility, because you'll be selling a lot more energy. It was just like talking to deaf ears. And that was the same state wide situation with respect to energy. We never had any Maine Public Service, ah, Central Maine Power is the same thing. Well, they eventually, they came so non-, I'm trying to find the term, they actually wound up in the situation where they actually weren't representing the best interests of their own people any more, and they came to realize the extent that they were losing their business. So, they were interesting days. Very frustrating days, too. Very frustrating.

DN: You also ran into problems with environmentalists on the subject of Dickey-Lincoln and Allagash.

EV: Yes, yes, yes, but I don't think, well, the, but I don't think that was, it could have been achieved even notwithstanding the opposition of environmentalists. I think we would have achieved it, in my own judgment. But what we could not achieve, what we could not, I think what defeated . . . Well, you were in that, you were in there, Don, perhaps even more to a greater extent than I was, you know, with being Ed's administrative assistant. So you perhaps have even more, you know, can provide more, you know, of an opinion.

DN: From a different perspective, yeah.

EV: But had we not had, for instance, the, how could a congressman from Connecticut, a Democratic congressman, keep opposing us for the development of the Dickey-Lincoln School? Well, you know, that's really what, one of the things that prevented us from being able to realize it. One final recollection is that we were not defeated by environmentalists, we were defeated by our own people.

DN: You were recalling Congressman [Frank] Kowalski of Connecticut, is that right?

EV: What's his name?

DN: Kowalski?

EV: I don't, it doesn't ring the name that I had in mind, though, but I can't think of his name, but there were more than one. Congressman, Democratic congressman, and generally, you know, supportive of, or should have been supportive of us. That's just an example.

DN: Nineteen sixty-six was the year you ran for the U.S. Senate. How did you get involved in that campaign?

EV: I don't know yet. Well, I don't know. I guess I had, I don't know if you'd say I had acquired the political bug. And I don't have a recollection right now of how this materialized, but I think, I don't think, I know that, well, by that time, you know, we'd made quite a lot of progress. I say *we*, I'm talking about the Democratic Party, quite a lot of progress in the legislature. And we had also elected a Democratic governor and we also had a congressman and we were moving up in the world. And the, Margaret Chase's term for the Senate was up, she was running for reelection. And I think the party was looking for someone who they felt maybe could make a contribution to the general election, keeping in mind that if we were going to do anything significant you had to, you couldn't give her a free hand in getting reelected. And somebody, you should try to put up a candidate that they felt would at least not be a detriment to the ticket.

And some of the people in our party, Ed Muskie and Beverly [Bustin Hathaway?] must have been involved, and Ken Curtis and others started trying to sell me with the idea of running for the seat. Well, of course, we knew that it undoubtedly would be an impossibility, but I think we also knew that she had passed her prime, or we thought she had passed her prime. And that, well, we had no idea that she would be defeated in that '66 election, but maybe we could make some forward progress against her. And it was with that conclusion that, of getting what they thought would be a fairly strong candidate. I had built a little bit of a reputation throughout the state up to that time with the, particularly with Allagash Waterway work and the Dickey-Lincoln School, and they thought that I might be the one that could hold her vote down and not, and be a help to the ticket. So somewhere or other they must have talked me into running. And it was a great experience, it was a great experience.

I went into it knowing undoubtedly what the result was going to be, but I also went into it, I knew I was not going to get any funding from the national Democratic Party, and I never did. Until after the election was over and one of them called me and, I don't know what he, he said he had a little bit of money for me. I said, "You know what you can do with that money now?" I says, "Stick it up your ass, it isn't worth it."

But at any rate, so we went about the state and it was a terrific, it was a great experience for me. I enjoyed the campaign, I never said one word against motherhood and the roles, and the just went about meeting people. I think we finally wound up with a budget of thirty-five thousand dollars that we spent in the election. And I worked hard, covered every corner of the state, wore out just about a car, uh, and it was a tremendous experience to get to know, meet people at every corner of the state and for me it was really a, it was everything that, it was a great experience and I think it was a great development for me, really. So, and, of course, wound up getting far more votes than I had thought there would, and far more than Margaret Chase-Smith thought there would be, whatever, polled against her. I think we had, I remember somebody told me that a couple of days after election she showed up at the (*telephone interruption*). Well, I guess, I don't know who told me, anyway she arrived at the, who was her administrative assistant?

DN: Bill Lewis.

EV: Bill Lewis, yeah, at the secretary of state's office in Augusta and wanted to look over some

of the results of the election and of course she did. But I guess she, the great puzzlement was that she couldn't believe that somebody'd gotten that many votes against her.

DN: Now in those days she didn't enter into any debates with you?

EV: No, no, no, and I never asked for one either. No, I just, I must say I probably just ignored her and went about my way, you know, meeting people throughout the state and telling them. At no time did I ever show any way of wanting to take her on or anything like that. But, see, I, nobody had, any candidate had run against her before had never gotten much more than thirty, thirty-three, thirty-four percent of the votes and I had gotten almost ten percent more in that election, so she couldn't understand that. But it also indicated that perhaps she had passed her prime and that she might be, probably might be vulnerable in the next election, you know, in a serious election where, you know. I think my election, I think my campaign was serious but in the sense what it showed might, could happen, and it did happen. Bill Hathaway ran against her and defeated her.

DN: You set the stage.

EV: Huh?

DN: You set the stage.

EV: Yeah, yeah.

DN: In that campaign, did you campaign closely with Ken Curtis?

EV: Which one, which campaign?

DN: In the '66 campaign?

EV: Oh yes, yes, we campaigned very closely together, yeah, yeah, yeah.

DN: And did you get any help from Ed Muskie in that campaign?

EV: I have no recollection, no. You might know. I don't have any recollection. I must have, I must have.

DN: The next campaign was 19-, you went back to practicing law after '66 and the next campaign was 1968, the presidential campaign, and there was a dispute at the Democratic state convention. What was that like from your perspective?

EV: Well, you had the, I saw it as a line up against, by, with the Kennedys and the Johnsons and the Humphreys, that's (*unintelligible phrase*). It was a, it was a hard, 1968, for me it was a hard campaign because the control, the control of the money was by the Kennedy side of the party. And Humphrey was not able to, was not generating very, very much money from his side. And, and that's how I viewed it. And for me personally, we had the Vietnam War in that picture if

you, I'm sure you remember, and I was against the Vietnam War personally, but . . . . And talking just for my own part of it, I felt that for me to discuss my views about the Vietnam War, I felt would be very harmful to Ed's position. And as we were, as you recall, at the Maine convention we had, I'm trying to find the term, Don, uh, well, we had wholeheartedly endorsed Ed, I mean, he was ...

DN: Favorite son.

EV: ... he was our favorite son candidate for the vice presidential nomination. And for me to have expressed what my own personal views were, which was to get the hell out of Vietnam, and I felt that Ed was trapped into that in some way or other. And so I was personally never able to say what I thought, you know, about Vietnam and so forth because of my fear to hurt his position, his opportunities to become the vice presidential candidate.

(*Pause.*)

DN: We were talking, Elmer, about the 1968 campaign and the conflict you faced because of your opposition to the Vietnam War and your feeling of support for Ed Muskie in the vice presidential campaign. You've had a personal connection with the war that must have had an impact on you. Denis served there and ...

EV: Well, that came later.

DN: That came later?

EV: Yes, yes. At that time, well, ...

DN: Okay, I stand corrected on that, Elmer. Denis went in in 1970, in the service, and went to Vietnam. In the 1968 campaign, particularly that state convention, there was a major dispute as you noted between the supporters of essentially Robert Kennedy at that point and Hubert Humphrey, and a real split in the party.

EV: Yes, there was, there was. Which resulted in, and the money that the, the money was actually controlled by the Kennedy side of the party, they had control of the money. So Humphrey, the Humphrey campaign was not generating any income at all, and they were having a very, very hard time. That's my recollection, unless I'm wrong.

DN: And you volunteered in that campaign. You became one of the advancemen.

EV: Yeah, I volunteered, I gave, I volunteered for my time in that campaign, you know, to work in Ed's campaign.

DN: Where did you do advance work?

EV: Well, I went to, I started, they had run into a, some problems, organizational problems, in the campaign in New England and particularly in the, in the Connecticut area. And they were

kind of short of people in, organization wise, they were picking up young people, you know, didn't have much experience and so forth, so. The, I don't know who called me one day and he said, told me about the problem. I don't know if that's George, was George with the senate then?

DN: Yeah, George was in the campaign.

EV: Well, it probably would have been George probably. But at any rate, told me the problem they were having in the Connecticut area and particularly in the New Haven-Hartford area, New Britain area, and they were just not getting anything done. And so he asked me if I'd go down and see if I could, you know, help. So I went down to New Haven and just, you know, fortuitous circumstances, the, and I went to the mayor's office. The mayor of New Haven was a fellow by the name of [Richard] Lee, and he had built up quite a reputation. He was one of the first mayors who perhaps had taken quite a big interest in the black and the Hispanic population that was then in the New Haven area and in fact he, Life had run an article on him, Life Magazine. And so I thought that, I decided I had to go to New Haven and see if I could get in to see him, talk to him about the Muskie campaign and so forth.

So I get to New Haven and I ask for the mayor's office and I went, the secretary I suppose, and said, I said, well, I introduced myself and told him why I was there. "Oh, you're here, well there's someone here who's been waiting for you, to see you." And, well, I said, "Who is it?" She says, his name is Dennis Resentis. "Oh, Dennis Resentis, good God," I said. Well, actually, Dennis Resentis married a girl from Van Buren and he was getting shipped out to Iceland, as a serviceman, and they wanted to get married. And at that time I was a municipal court judge in Van Buren, so worked things out, got him a license and they had to skip the time spans, you know, to get a marriage license, so we did all that and they got married. And she was a Lapointe girl who lived, grew up next door to me.

So he was there, he had become Lee's administrative assistant. So I said, so we, he and Connie [Lapointe Resentis], his wife's name, so we talked and reminisced and so forth and I said, "You're the mayor's administrative assistant." I said, "Is there any chance that I can meet him, talk to him?" Oh, he says, "I can arrange that." So we went in the mayor's office and he introduced me to the mayor and told him who I was and I told him myself who I was, and I told him why I was there. So I said, you know, the, "Senator Muskie is coming here, he's on a tour, and I said, he told how much he admired Senator Muskie and how much he liked him." And I said, "I'd like to get some help to organize something for him when he comes here." They have not been able to hardly do anything at all and they're very, very worried. Ed was going to leave from White Plains, New York, fly into New Haven, and then try to do some, you know. And so I told him the situation, who I was, why I was there. I was not a paid employee of a campaign, I was giving a month of my time to Senator Muskie out of my office, to try to help him in his campaign.

So we talked and so he, and I said, "I know the reputation that you've built, you know, in this area," and I said, "I think you could help the senator if you were so inclined." So we talked, so anyway we get to a point. So he turns to Dennis, his "A, he says, "Dennis," he says, "see if there's anything we can do for the senator." "Oh," Dennis says, "I think there is." "Okay," he

says, “let’s go to work.” So, I’m telling you, things really flew from that time on, god almighty.

They were building, Knights of Columbus was building a twin tower, you know, I don’t know how many stories it was, but twenty-five, thirty stories high, and that was in the process of construction. There were about seven thousand men working on that project. So he sure went to work, he got a work stoppage. So Ed came in, you know, and Ed came into New Britain, and into New Haven, and sat down with the mayor for awhile and so forth and so on. And then, he worked out a work stoppage of that whole damn project and rigged everything up with loud speakers and so forth. So that, for a half hour, Ed had their time and then it would also, went to some big plaza or something, insurance, one of the big insurance companies’ plazas there, and then addressed all of them at all. And so it was a damn productive stop in Connecticut, let me tell you.

DN: So the municipal judge’s work paid off.

EV: So that was pretty, and then of course he circled New Britain also and arranged for him to go to New Britain. In fact, that’s where we took off from, New Britain, to fly to Los Angeles.

DN: And you, well you must have encountered some other Maine people in the Connecticut area.

EV: Well, Maine people, cripes, it’s flooded with Van–, valley people, Connecticut area, New Britain especially. Not New Haven very much, but New Britain, ye gods, oh yeah, he took us to the French club and all those things. I remember Ed, and my brother lived in New Britain and I could hardly, all I could say was just say hello to him, and off we took. Ed spoke on the City Hall of New Britain, and that’s, we took off from there and headed for the plane and for Los Angeles.

DN: You went out to Los Angeles and did some work there.

EV: Yeah, yeah. I was there for, jeez, it was close to two weeks, I think.

DN: And you were also in Texas.

EV: Oh, well, when, I was in Los Angeles for close to two weeks and did, we did quite a lot of work there, actually. They were having some labor problem there that wasn’t, things weren’t working too, too well. Some conflicts, there’s always conflicts, you know, between groups and so forth, but we worked out, they had, we worked out a pretty good arrangement there. There was, the big uh, the big event for Ed’s coming to Los Angeles was a, a music show at the Santa Monica auditorium. And the person who was hosting that was a, what the hell was her name, popular singer. Uh, ...

DN: Was it Edie Adams?

EV: No, no, uh, oh, she’s still famous.

DN: Peggy Lee?

EV: At any rate, so anyway, she was the hostess and, because it was Ed Muskie, and so they did quite a program there.

DN: Excuse me, we're going to ...

End of Side Two, Tape One
Side One, Tape Two

DN: ... with Elmer Violette, the second done on the 31st of October, 1998. And, Elmer, we were just talking about Los Angeles and a big event hosted by a singer at that time, and you'd been doing ...

EV: Her name will come to my mind, maybe we can get in there at some later point. That's right, so anyway the program went on and Ed spoke very, very well. And just a little aside, I had to, while Ed was speaking, you also have to remember that Ed gave two speeches always, you know, he had this canned one and then he'd wind up, you know, give the real ...

DN: The real speech.

EV: Am I right? At any rate, so he was, I had to go, I backed out of the auditorium and I had to make some kind of phone call, I don't remember what it was for, why it was, but I had to do it. So I backed off the stage and went out around and out and I went to a phone booth. And then after I did what I had to do, I saw these ladies coming out of the auditorium. And I said, "Have you been," I said, "you're coming out of the auditorium, did you hear Senator Muskie?" "Oh yes," they said. I said, "Well," I said, "how come you're leaving, you know, don't you . . . . ?" "Oh," she said, "we're going to vote for him, but we have to catch our train back home so that's why we're leaving. We wish we could have stayed." So obviously he was doing all right.

DN: And you went from Los Angeles to Texas?

EV: Yeah, we finished in Los Angeles, or I did anyway, because there was a headquarter there all the time. I'm trying to, one of the better, one of the hotels there, oh, hell, yes, in fact we had a little problem there in Los Angeles. They, oh yeah, I think it's worth noting. I'd forgotten all about that. They had, as I was telling you they are having money problems and they, at this hotel, Ed was due, in I don't know, at some point or other, and they had told the campaign manager earlier that they had to have some money. And he was coming in within two or three days and they needed x thousands of dollars and they didn't have it.

So I, the guy who was running the operation in Los Angeles asked me if I could see the manager and talk to him. So I said, "Okay, you arrange it and I'll talk to him." And so, I've forgotten his name now, but the name is not important. So I sat down and I told him who I was just to set relations, and I said, I told him that I came from Aroostook County and, you know, potato growing area. Well, it turns out that he grew up on a potato farm out in central New York and

grew up on a potato farm and knew all about potatoes and knew all about Maine potatoes, so we talked potatoes. And then I told him why I was there and so forth, and I also told him that immediately we did not have the money but I could guarantee him that by the time that Ed Muskie arrived they would have the money. So he bought that. So uh, so, but, and they got the money, yeah. So that, but if I'd not run into another potato guy that, you know, who had the power to make the decision whether Ed Muskie was going to come, whether they were going to let him come in. It turned out to be quite a coincidence. So many little things like that that happened along the way.

DN: Were there any other encounters like that, or human interest encounters in either Connecticut or Los Angeles?

EV: No, what I'm telling you, the one that I'm telling you was in Los Angeles. And I know I told you about the one in New Haven.

DN: You told me about that, yeah. You went on to Texas ...

EV: We went on to Texas, so we left Los Angeles and Ed was making a tour of the northern, swing through northern Texas. And first, and I can't, I don't know if I can remember, we were making four or five stops in that swing. We landed at Amarillo, Texas. So who's out on the apron of the air-, of the runway, the crowd there, a mariachi band, and I look and there was Gerry Conley with a big Texas hat and a mariachi orchestra and that was hilarious. He'd been working down there, I didn't know he was there. So there was a lot of people working a lot of places. So we swung down and the stops were at the university campuses on each of these places. We'd land, get onto, get into, you know, cars and so forth, and go to the campus, at the, you know, the auditorium, and Ed would speak and then take off and I think it was Wichita Falls, ...

DN: Was Lubbock in that?

EV: Lubbock, those that were, had made, very significant campuses, University of Texas campuses, they were big campuses. And so we'd get off and make another stop. We wound up that night in Tyler, in Tyler, Texas, so we did the whole slew of the northern tier. And then we, from there we went on to Nashville and Kentucky and Cincinnati. We stayed in, we slept in Cincinnati that night and I left the train and headed back to Van Buren.

DN: That was quite an experience. What were the major things you learned from that month of campaigning at the national level?

EV: Oh God, I don't whether it's significant enough. I, it was a tremendous experience for me personally. The, I think I got a fairly, I think I got a pretty good picture of what was happening in the country politically with respect to the presidential campaign. And, and how it looked to me, you know, we were getting fairly close to, you know, not that far from election. And so when Ed landed in White Plains, New York and I met him there and then we went on up through Connecticut, he said, "How are we doing?" I said, "Well Ed," I said, "three weeks ago I would have said you're not doing, but I think right now that," how did I put it, "I think right now

that things have turned for the better, and I think there's a chance."

I had, before I left Van Buren, I had run into a very strong Republican in Van Buren, one of my personal friends, he was a dentist, no he's an optometrist. Well he, so he knew that I was getting involved and he said, "Well," he said, "Elmer," he said, "I hope that Muskie wins, and Hum…, I hope Humphrey and Muskie win." He said, "You know, I've been watching all this and," he said, "I would very, very much like to see Ed Muskie as vice president." And he said, "I'm going to vote for him." I said, "Have you heard some people saying?" He said, "I think, you know, it's changing." So, and that's how it turned out, too.

So when Ed landed in White Plains, "Well," he says, "Elmer," he says, "how are things going?" "Well," I said, I just gave him that little blurb about this friend of mine. And I said, "If this staunch Republican in Van Buren has made up his mind now that he'd like to vote for Humphrey and for you," I said, "it's possible." So I said, "Let's go on."

DN: You've mentioned Ed asking you that question, and you also talked about his two speeches. What was your impression of his mood, his spirit, during that campaign from the time you saw him at the state convention in March through the fall campaign?

EV: Well, I think he was, I think he was a little bit dispirited, but not, no, not significantly so because he had, I mean, he was getting much more information from other people than I could give him, you know. What I was telling him was what I thought was happening, but the money was starting to get, to loosen up. I think that the, the money pockets were starting to loosen up somewhat, and that was starting to help. And unfortunately, had that money been loosened up a couple of months before, I think they would have won that election, in my judgment. Because for, for, and I think a lot of people also, until very late in the campaign, had never, had never had a very, very high opinion of Hubert Humphrey.

The major candidate, the best candidate in that campaign was Ed Muskie, not Hubert Humphrey, that's a fact. No doubt about that. But people did finally come to recognize that there was more to Hubert Humphrey than just being a glib, a glib person, and there was a lot to Hubert Humphrey, and I think that helped a great deal, too. And two and two together, they almost made it, just by an eyelash, really. And, uh, you know, but I've always blamed the Kennedys, who were controlling the purse strings, for having lost that election. That's my own opinion and I'll never, nobody's made any, showed me anything that, about the Kennedys that's made me change my mind. Not that I dislike the Kennedys, but.

DN: Now, after that campaign, was it soon after that election that you went on the bench?

EV: No, I went on the bench in 1973.

DN: Seventy-three.

EV: Yeah.

DN: Appointed by Governor Curtis.

EV: Right, right.

DN: So you were still active politically through that ...

EV: Oh well, I ran for congress in 1972.

DN: That's right. So, and what was that campaign like? Was it much different from your campaign in '66?

EV: Well, yeah, yes, it was very different. I don't know that I care very much to talk about that campaign. I don't think I did a very good job in that campaign. I was out-financed, you know, the Republicans decided that they had to put in some money into that campaign and so I was not able to raise money. Well, as it wound up, I think he raised about between two-hundred-and-fifty and three-hundred thousand dollars and I raised a hundred-and-twenty-five thousand dollars. And with all the media work and so forth, and I also wound up with the problem of management of campaign which, I don't know, at any rate I always thought I should have won that election, you know, I could have won that election if, but, I don't know. But I came out of it, I came out of that election somewhat of a, on a sour note personally. It's hard, I shouldn't be saying anything like that, but ...

DN: Well ...

EV: They put out a lot of, you know, not lies but misinformation throughout, in their campaign, and I didn't have a good management to my campaign. I guess that was a weakness of my campaign. And, but also, we were getting into the modern age of news media and television and more of it, and more of it, and more of it, and I couldn't compete with the money, you know, that . . . .

DN: As you look back ...

EV: But I always, nobody ever changed my mind that I was a more knowledgeable and I was a more capable candidate myself, personally, that's my opinion, than Bill Cohen.

DN: Was there, do you regard 1972 as a kind of watershed year in terms of the types of campaigns?

EV: Oh yes, no question about it. That's why I say, you know, I, yeah.

DN: Now, had you been involved in the 1970 gubern…, senatorial race when (*unintelligible word - Elmer coughing* ***probably: Ed was running***) for reelection?

EV: Well, Ed ran ...

DN: Yeah, for reelection in '70. Had you worked in that campaign?

EV: To some extent, yes.

DN: But primarily locally?

EV: Yeah. Ed did not have any serious, well, he did, what was that guy's name that ran against him?

DN: Was that the Cliff McIntire, no, that was, 1970 was Monks, wasn't it?

EV: Monks, yeah, Bob Monks, yeah.

DN: Or did Monks run in '76? I'm trying to remember which now.

EV: I think it was 1970. I don't recall. I don't know, I don't recall, Don.

DN: Neil Bishop ran once in there in . . . . but 1970 . . . . Sixty-four was Cliff McIntire. And 1970, I don't remember either. I'll have to look it up.

EV: In 1972, for instance, this fellow that promised me that he would manage my campaign, and then later on, and then he decided that he'd run for the legisla…, a legislative seat, which he proceeded to do, so I was left without a campaign manager. And I couldn't find anybody to, you know, to replace him.

DN: And in '72 Bill Hathaway was running against Margaret Chase Smith, and Ken Curtis was, no, who was running, there was a gubernatorial race, um, ...

EV: Ken Curtis was still governor.

DN: He was still governor until '74.

EV: Yep.

DN: And so there was no gubernatorial race, there was a senate race and congressional races. And was there a unified campaign that year? Up to that point most of the campaigns had been ...

EV: No, it was becoming less and less. Campaigns were becoming less and less unified. The, it was the man and not the party that was the, you know, up front, if I make myself clear.

DN: I was struck by your, the two figures you gave me, 1966 when you ran for the U.S. Senate your campaign budget was thirty-five thousand, ...

EV: Yeah, and we never got one cent from the federal, from federal money, we never got one dollar federal money until ...

DN: Until after it was over.

EV: ... until after it was over. And what they offered me, what they wanted to, that was, well George Meany was the head of that, was the one who controlled that deal. We never got a dollar from them, yeah.

DN: Then in 1972 you ran for the last time and then in '73 Ken appointed you to the court. That was to the Superior Court at that time?

EV: Yeah. He in fact offered to appoint me to the Supreme Court, but I had been through one battle years before when he had nominated me for chairman of the public utilities commission. And we had darn near (*unintelligible word*) for over a year with the famous governor's council. So when he, then, when he offered me, after the 1972 campaign he offered me, he called me and he said, "Well, are you still interested in becoming a judge?" "Well," I said, "yeah, I think maybe now I might be interested." So I said, "I'll talk about it with the family and so forth." And, so, I said, yeah, I said, so he offered me, he says, "I've got a Supreme Court appointment and I've got a Superior Court appointment." "Well," I said, "I don't want to get into another fight with the governor's council, you know. I'd like to go to the Supreme Court but," I said, "you better find out, you know, I don't want to have any fights." So he contacted me and he said, "Well, I can't get enough votes," he says, "all I can get is three votes for you." And he says, "That's nothing against you. They wish they could, but they said they don't want to break a precedence of having somebody appointed from a cir-, as a, from a, straight to the Supreme Court without making that, the Superior Court." And he says, "They just don't feel that they, it's nothing against you, they wish they could but they don't want to break that precedent." So I said, "Well, all right then, I'll go in Superior Court.

DN: And you served on the Superior Court for how long before ...?

EV: For eight years, until 1981. And Joe Brennan ...

DN: Appointed you to the Supreme Court.

EV: ...nominated me to the Supreme Court.

DN: What was the fight in the public utilities commission? Were there any public arguments against your being appointed as chair of the public utilities commission?

EV: Oh, they, they just, yeah, they just didn't like my philosophy. [Laughter] My political philosophy on utilities. [Laughter]

DN: So it was a real contest over regulatory policy.

EV: Absolutely, oh yes, yeah, yeah.

DN: And the governor's council was still Republican at that time?

EV: Yeah, oh absolutely, yeah. I could always manage to get some votes, you know, from, from the council, but not enough to ...

DN: In your court years, you obviously were concentrating first on trial issues and then on appeals decisions and moving away from day-to-day politics. Did you find that your political experience had an impact on the way you performed as a judge?

EV: I, well my, it's hard to put that, my political experience and my career of involvement in politics is all, all becomes, you know, part of you and it all becomes part of your, you know, a suitcase that you carry around with you. So, to say that my experience in the political arena clouded my ability to make judicial decisions, I don't think that it ever did. I would not, I don't think it would be truthful to say that, you know, you're at a certain age, you've been through certain period of years where you've done this, that and that. Well, you can't throw away half of that and say that's not part of me any more, but on the other hand, it also is important. I guess it comes down to the man himself and whether he can, what prejudices he may possibly have one way or another, whether or not that is not going to affect his decision as a judge. I think I was always given credit, I think, I'm not sure, that people could look at me that way.

DN: When uh, when you think particularly about the Supreme Judicial Court and the role of the justice there, did you find that you were applying lessons you'd learned in your political career, not in terms of political biases on particular decisions, but in the discussions and the negotiations that would inevitably occur as you deliberated as a court?

EV: Oh, I think they did, I think they did, yes. I mean I brought, I had a, I had a philosophy and I think it reflected itself on my, on what I did as a justice on the lower court. And I think that at times I was a constructive contribution, because many of these people that we had, well, many of these people, I mean, many, justices in the law court had not been through, they may have practiced law, but practicing law is somewhat more restrictive and restricted environment for someone to acquire a very, very broad knowledge of what life is and what should be the laws in our state. I could bring that, but I could also bring something else that they did not have, and I think that the court itself at times found it very, very, you know, worthwhile. I could be wrong. I've never laid claim, and I lay no claim today that I was a great judge, I don't think I ever was looked upon as a great judge, and that hasn't bothered me at all. I did the best I could. But nonetheless, I enjoyed the law court very, very much. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the collegiality of the law court, and discussions and so forth. Getting your oar in there and dipping it in with everybody else's, and I thought I made some contribution to the jurisprudence in the state in small part.

DN: Speaking of broader views, you have, in our early discussion we talked a bit about the influence of church on you, in your . . . .

EV: Of what?

DN: The church, on you as a young person and I know that you and Marcella have been very active in the church as lay leaders. In uh, in the years in which you were associated with Ed Muskie, did you ever get a sense of how his religious faith influenced him? Did he ever talk to you much about the church and faith?

EV: No. No, I have no recollection of ...

DN: I wanted to ask you a couple of questions about people, Elmer. I think we've pretty much covered your career and your experiences, but there are two people in particular I wanted to ask you about. One is Bob Haskell and the other is John Martin, both of whom have been strong political leaders in Maine. What was it like working with Bob Haskell?

EV: Well, I, initially we, we weren't, we never, I can say we were never very close, but we were never very much in agreement to begin with. I personally liked Bob Haskell. One thing that you knew about Bob Haskell is what you knew, is what he told you. He told you what he thought, you know, he didn't mince any words. But I think that as time went on we, we came to a closer relationship. And I just learned after, and this is never something that I was aware of or even conscious of, that during the procedures on the Allagash Waterway, we made some, a decision totally oblivious of who else, who might be affected, that affected the amount of water that would be available to the utilities in Maine, which included, of course, Bangor Hydro.

And he told me in later years that how much he had appreciated what we had done in that, on that, and how much it had helped him, and how grateful he was and so forth. Now that's a fact, now. And we had, like I told Bob one time, I said, "You know Bob, this thing is going all over," and so forth and so on, I said, "particularly about your opposition to the Allagash Waterway," and so forth. And I said, "Everything that results from," I said, "it could have been much harder, couldn't it?" He says, "Elmer, it certainly could have." [Laughter] And so, you know, I knew it, not unwittingly but without any awareness shall we say of that, you know, that, what happened is that the availability of water had become much more guaranteed to them because . . . .

DN: Because of Churchill Dam.

EV: Because of the, yeah, and you know, everything we'd done. So, you never know where you get your friends eventually. So we got to have a very, very good relationship. And I know that when I ran for the Maine senate, no, for congress, he didn't give me any money directly, but I subsequently learned that we had give–, gotten some money from Bob.

DN: John Martin sort of grew up under your tutelage politically.

EV: Well, I guess, I don't know about that. I don't know whether I gave birth or what to his . . . . When John wanted to run, you know, for the legislature, John came from a very predominantly Republican family, and there were a lot of Democrats, you know, didn't want to support him. But uh, and we had the legislator in the Eagle Lake, Aloysius Gallant, who is a nice man, but I don't think he knew the time of day. Real nice man. And so John's going to run against him. But I somewhere or other got to know John and I was convinced that John would go to the legislature as a Democrat and then get, I mean, he had quite a lot to contribute. And so I talked to our Democratic leaders in the county to go along with him.

DN: John says that in '65-'66 legislature, that he had a real seminar in politics and government riding back and forth from Aroostook county to Augusta with you and Floyd [Harding] and

Emilien [Levesque].

EV: Yeah, yeah, that's right, he used to accuse us down in Augusta of holding our caucuses in the, traveling between Augusta and Aroostook, yeah. And John was . . . .

DN: Now the four of you offer some contrasts, you're very different people each of you. What was it like working with Emilien?

EV: Oh, it was good working with Emilien. Emilien was, had a very, very easy temperament, you know, and uh, and he's a good legislator. He was a very effective leader, really, in the sense that he got along well with, you know, members of the house, legislators. And he was, I thought he was a good legislator. A legislator in the sense of, I don't think Emilien was a, an innovator of legislation. He got the distinction to being able to pick up legislation and discern what's good and what's bad, that he was good at.

DN: Were you, as you traveled back and forth, did you get into hot debates or were you pretty much in agreement on issues?

EV: Well, no, I don't, I don't recall getting into some pretty heated debates. We generally were in pretty close agreement on most of the political issues certainly, so it was more how we were going to handle the other side. [Laughter]

DN: How much of it was how you were going to handle other Democrats?

EV: Yeah, that's right, that's right. If we weren't talking on the record ...

DN: Okay, Elmer. Thank you very much.

EV: I don't want to, I, for instance I, John . . . . There came a time when the leadership had to be decided in the house and Louis [Jalbert] came to me and he said, "Are you, who are you going to support for the leadership in the house?" Not the speakership, now, the leadership, Democratic leadership. And I said, "Well." He said, "You're going to be the minority leader in the senate," and he said, "I don't think it's fair to have John become majority leader in the house." So he says, "Are you going to support him?" I said, "I'm, Louis, I'm going to be very honest with you, I'm not, you're each on your own, you know, and you make your arguments to the members of the house." And, "I'm not going to go in there and campaign for John, and I'm not going to go in the house and campaign against you. But I'm also not going to go tell John, 'well look, you should support Louis because you're going to wind up with both leaderships from the St. John Valley.'" I said, "I'm not going to do that, Louis." So, from that time on I knew that I, where my, I did not have a friend, I tell you.

End of interview.